

mike wheeler & the acquisition of a clue by lonelyghosts

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Summary:

Mike Wheeler is really confused about what's happening with the Lucas/Dustin/Max/Will romantic situation.

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Author's Note:

mike wheeler? oblivious dumbass baby girl? it's more likely than you think!

credit to OpheliaMarina for the absolutely wonderful idea of jean-ralphio saperstein/steve harrington. its real and its true and they r (mildly narcissistic) bisexuals together.

Mike Wheeler was confused.

Granted, she was on some level always confused. In the past few years, her best friend went missing in an alternate Hell dimension, she found a girl standing in the rain with a tattoo on her arm and cool as hell magic powers, she fought a creature straight out of her D&D book, she fell in love, her best friend got possessed, her girlfriend went missing for a year, Joyce got a new boyfriend and then he promptly got eaten by demon dogs, a new girl entered their party, Steve became the party mother hen, and Mike herself had a gender crisis. All in all it's been a mess, and a lot of the time Mike has been completely and utterly lost in terms of what was going on.

Theese days, though, things were pretty nice. Hopper started homeschooling El, because she wasn't allowed at the school-something about 'alerting the government' and 'unnecessary risk', but Mike dropped by their cabin when she could, and El was allowed to hang out at Will and Dustin and Lucas's houses. Not Mike's- things had been tense enough there ever since Mike came out, and she was pretty sure that Karen would recognize Eleven anyways. Will stopped throwing up slugs, Steve and Nancy made up, and even better, Mike was no longer closeted.

Mike had always known on a certain level that she was a girl. Eleven had been the first one to know without needing to ask or be told. Her perceptive eye were sharp, hawklike and even at the age of eleven she had never missed a thing. Mike thought that maybe that very first night Eleven knew the truth- divined it, from the way Mike held her

body, slack and slumping and uncomfortable in her own skin. Eleven was able to see through to the heart of Mike with only a glance. It was one of the things that Mike loved about her.

Before Eleven, though, she'd extended the thought to Will. He had been the first to know what she meant. It had been after school, on their bikes, spring melting around them. "Do you ever wish you were a girl?" Mike'd asked, hesitant, and Will had shook his head. "I think I know what you mean, though," he'd added. "The wanting to be something you're not."

And Mike'd known that Will had known what she meant. She could hear what he meant, too. They had always been able to read between the lines with each other.

But the first person that she ever told for real- said it out loud, no metaphors or minced words- that had been Nancy. After El came back, the idea that people would think that she was El's boyfriend- it hurt. It stung. So she had told Nancy the truth.

Sitting on her bed, picking at her nails, Mike'd forced every word out, explained the unhappiness with her body, the way boyhood pinched and tugged, and finally the words- I'm a girl- and Nancy'd nodded, clasped Mike's hands.

"You know, Jonathan is a girl too," Nancy had told her, eyes wide and understanding. "Her name is Jo."

After that it'd been easier to let the rest of them know- a meeting at Will's house, the explanation all over again. The pause as it sank in, and then Dustin joking that it explained why Mike was so bad at Pac-Man, and the sheer breadth of the relief that hit her in the chest.

There was a lot of stuff that happened after that- telling her mom, which didn't go well, telling Hopper and Joyce, which did- but it shakes out like this: Mike wears skirts at home and at her friends' house, and grows out her hair, and steals Nancy's lipstick sometimes. For the first time she feels happy.

But all that aside: Mike was now confused. And she was confused about one thing specifically: Dustin, Lucas, Will, and Max, and their

relationship status.

It was weird, that's all! Like, they were sixteen now and she had been confused about this since the age of fourteen, because there was just so much conflicting information about them. She remembered that at the Snow Ball, she'd seen Max and Lucas dancing, and Max had kissed Lucas on the mouth, so she'd figured they were dating, or going steady, or whatever the word they were using was. She'd known that Dustin was jealous of Lucas, so when she'd come to school one day and Dustin was refusing to talk to Lucas or Max, she'd been pissed because *hello*, she'd thought they were over that bullshit, but at least she'd understood what was going on.

When not even a month after Dustin started giving Lucas and Max the silent treatment Mike stumbled in on Dustin and Will kissing in her basement, she'd figured it was about something else, since clearly Dustin & Will were dating now.

But stuff. Kept. Happening.

She'd walked in on Dustin and Lucas snuggling in a decidedly couple-like manner on the Henderson's couch. She'd seen Lucas hand-feeding Will french fries at the diner. And the weird stuff kept piling up. Mike knew that she would never look at ice cream cones the same way again.

Mike had taken to keeping a big cork board on her wall with pins and papers with various labels on them, all tied together with string. There were lots of question marks strewn about.

What she'd come to believe was that either Lucas and Max were dating and Dustin was dating Will, or Dustin was dating Lucas, or Lucas was dating Will. She wasn't sure.

It wasn't as though she hadn't asked about what was going on! She'd asked Jo once, and Jo had rolled her eyes and said, "Kiddo, do you really think I'm that invested in my little brother's love life?" before ruffling her hair and walking away. She'd asked Nancy and Nancy had told Mike that she was "the single most unobservant person on the planet Earth", which didn't make sense because Mike was very observant! This whole mess had started because she was too

observant!

She'd asked El way back at the beginning, and El had just kissed her cheek and said something about how she thought that they were "figuring it out", whatever that meant. At this point, Mike was considering asking Hopper of all people if he knew what was going on, but instead she settled for asking Steve. He hung out with Dustin when he was in town, after all; Mike figured he might have some idea of what the issue was.

So one day after a long D&D session, Mike approached Steve after everyone had left. He was leaning up against the porch railing, flipping through an old edition of the D&D books, and Mike sidled up to him, crossing her arms in an attempt to look casual.

"Hey, Harrington," she nodded at him, and Steve smiled, eyes still fixed on a page about chimeras.

"Hey, mini-Wheeler," he replied, and Mike rolled her eyes. Externally she scoffed and complained about Steve's nicknames, but really, she kind of liked them. Mike wasn't especially tall for her age, but she was taller than most of the girls in her grade, something that could be upsetting on days when Mike's body felt like it would never fit her the way she needed it to. Mike knew that she was taller than her older sister, but in Steve's eyes, she would always be the smaller Wheeler. It was comforting.

"Sooooo..." Mike drew the words out, chancing a glance at Steve under her brow. "How's Dustin doing?"

Steve was smiling in that ridiculous obnoxious way that people did when they knew something that she didn't. "He's good. Thought you'd know that, after all, considering you're his best friend."

"I meant... beyond normal. Like... in terms of Dustin's love life."

Steve snorted. "Wow, Wheeler, you really have no tact at all, do you?"

"What? I'm not- I'm not-there's no-" Mike sputtered, trying to regain the upper hand in the conversation again. She was starting to wonder

if she'd ever had it to begin with. "It's not- I'm just wondering!"

Steve laughed, and Mike briefly contemplated killing him. "Listen, Nancy and Jo have both mentioned that you wanted to know what was up with the party's romantic situation. It was only a matter of time before you asked me what was up with him."

"Then why don't you tell me?" Mike burst out. "I'm so confused, I don't know what's happening, and they're my best friends! I want to know if there's stuff happening that-"

"Wow, you really are oblivious, aren't you?" Steve's eyes danced with mirth, and Mike wondered if El would help her hide the body. "Listen, kiddo, this isn't something I should be telling you anyways. Just ask Dustin, alright? It's not like he'll be mad at you for asking. The two of you are best friends. It's not even that big of a deal- I think they're wondering why you haven't asked them at this point."

And with that, Steve snapped the Monster's Manual shut and hopped off the porch as a pair of headlights drew up the driveway, waving at his roommate Jean Ralphio, who poked his head out from behind the wheel and gave Mike the peace sign, smirking as he did.

Mike flipped him the bird in response.

The only thing left to do at that point was go directly to the source. Mike had a plan for how she'd do it- she'd ask Dustin to stay after a D&D campaign session, and then she'd gently ask the question in a way that wouldn't make him feel cornered or pressured. If he denied it, she'd (again, gently) point out the evidence that *something* was happening, and then ask the question again. She didn't think that Dustin would lie to her, in any case.

Unfortunately, the confrontation went a little differently.

They were eating lunch at Lucas's house with the whole party, save Steve, and Max leaned over and stole a spoonful of mac'n'cheese off Lucas's plate. Lucas made a noise of protest, but Max merely smiled.

"You know you love it, stalker," she told him, fondness evident in her voice, and Lucas laughed and smiled over at her.

"You happen to be right on that count," Lucas replied, and laced his fingers through her own, squeezing her hand gently. Mike's brain made a noise similar to ?!?!?!?? internally, but she brushed it off, mentally filing it in the folder entitled 'Max & Lucas' somewhere in the back of her mind.

It wouldn't have been that distinctive in her mind if not for the fact that both Dustin and Will pouted from their spots across the table, which Lucas caught sight of and laughed at, holding up his other hand apologetically.

"Sorry, guys, I've only got two hands," he told them with faux regret heavy in his voice. "Y'all can just hold hands anyways, can't you?"

"Yeah, yeah," Will rolled his eyes and clasped Dustin's hand in his own. "We're just teasing, anyways."

It was too much. Mike was burning up with curiosity. She banged her spoon down on the table- perhaps louder than was strictly necessary, given the way that Will jumped in his seat. Mike lowered her fork guiltily.

"Sorry, I'm just-" she waved her fork between the quartet. "I'm not trying to pry or anything, I just want to know what's going on with the four of you. It's just confusing, that's all, because one minute Lucas and Max are acting exactly like a couple and the next Dustin and Lucas are snuggling on the couch, and then Lucas and Will are going to the movies together to watch a rom-com, but at the same time Dustin and Will are planning to go to the Sno Ball together, and I've been trying to figure out exactly what's going on for *months* but I've just gotten more and more confused and I have to know!"

Mike stopped, her chest heaving a little from the length of her impromptu speech. Across the table, Lucas and Max stared at one another, exchanging looks with Dustin and Will. The four of them had expressions of shock on their faces, and for a moment Mike wondered if she'd overstepped.

Then they burst into laughter, and Mike's fear was replaced by embarrassed anger.

"Hey! It's not like it's that obvious, is it? Stop laughing, you guys, I'm serious!"

Max sighed a final laugh, and wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. "God, Mike, you're such an idiot. How long have you been wondering this?"

Mike shrugged, cheeks heating up. "I dunno, since the day I saw Lucas and Dustin snuggling on the Hendersons' couch back in freshman year? I'd seen Lucas and Max kissing at the Sno Ball and Dustin & Will making out in my basement- that was my *basement* by the way, can you please do that stuff somewhere other than my house- but then you two were cuddling and I had no idea what was happening anymore."

Will had buried his face in his hands and now he groaned. "I told you we shouldn't have been in there, Dustin, that was so awkward-"

"Hey! That was your idea, I'll have you know-"

"Yeah, if by 'my idea' you mean 'absolutely your idea' then sure-"

Lucas was rolling his eyes, stifling giggles of his own. Mike wondered why her friends were like this. "Mike, you're my best friend and I love you, but you're an idiot."

"I've heard," Mike grumbled. "From like four different people now."

"What's going *on*," Will chimed in at last, glaring at the other three, "if none of you are going to explain it, is that we're all dating."

Mike sat back, taken aback by that. "Wait. What?"

Max rolled her eyes. "That's not exactly true. I resent the idea that I would ever date either of you. Neither of you are my type." She pointed at Dustin and Will. "No offense meant, Lucas," she added, looking up at him from her spot at his left.

"None taken."

"Yeah, and I'm only into boys," Will added, inclining his head at Max. "You're cool, Max, but again: not a boy."

"So... wait. What?" Mike furrowed her brow, still confused. "What's the situation?"

Max sighed and picked up her spoon. "I'm dating Lucas. Lucas is dating Will, and Will is dating Dustin, and Dustin's dating Lucas. It's that simple."

"I don't think that's all that simple," Mike said, still trying to wrap her head around the concept.

"When is anything ever simple with us?" Dustin asked as he speared a piece of balsamic chicken on his fork.

"That's fair," Mike conceded, and turned to El. "Did you know about this?"

El shrugged. "Obvious."

Mike sighed. "Well, I'm happy for you guys in any case. So long as we're happy."

Max smiled at her genuinely. "Yeah. We're good. You know what, Mike? We're really good."

And Mike might have been the most oblivious person on the planet, but she knew that Max was telling the truth. She looked at Lucas and Max, holding hands on top of the table; Dustin, smiling at Will, who was holding Lucas's and Dustin's hands, and she knew that here, now, in this moment, they are all full of joy.